

Community Routes

David Jardine visits Colombia



The contact between Divine Healing Ministries in Belfast and the Church in Colombia began about three years ago. It came through a Dutchman, Pastor Hendrick, who has worked for twenty-two years in Colombia. He has been visiting Northern Ireland for many years and he started coming to our healing services. He invited Divine Healing Ministries to send a team to Colombia, to the city of Cali. We first went in 2008, so the visit in January 2010 was a follow-up.

Cali is reckoned to be the most violent city in the world. There are 15 - 20 people killed every day and between 100 and 200 at the weekend. There are three sources of violence, - drugs, ordinary crime and terrorist organizations. Farc terrorists still hold over 700 people hostage. These people are often captured by ordinary criminals who then sell them to the Farc. Although we were very aware of the dangerous situation we were going into we also knew that if we did what the local people told us we would probably be safe. Indeed they would never allow us to go out alone. Even going to the nearby Palmetto Centre, where we made phone calls, they insisted that we be accompanied. That was great security for us. In addition, I felt on the Feast of the Epiphany, as I read Psalm 138, that the Lord gave us a verse for the trip, 'Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you keep me safe.' We held onto that promise, a very appropriate verse for our mission.

Although we were involved in many different activities in Cali the main part of our mission was preaching in a whole variety of churches, and then praying for people. On a number of occasions we were praying individually for between 100 and 200 people. This would normally be very taxing, but we were surrounded by a whole volume of prayer back home, and this just seemed to carry us through whatever challenge we came up against.

People in Colombia are very open to receive prayer, even in public places. We were out one afternoon giving out leaflets about the following Sunday's service. Many of the people to whom we spoke accepted the offer of a prayer for healing, right there on the edge of a busy road.

Pastor Hendrick said publicly on more than one occasion that, out of all the groups who come to Colombia, their relationship with the group from Belfast is the best of all. I always knew that the Irish personality travels well, and bringing a faith that has been refined in the most difficult of circumstances we relate well to a people who have had to face much adversity. I think this relationship between the Church in Colombia and the Church in Ireland is only going to grow and develop.

SSF in Assisi



Thomas Anthony writes:

What is the place of a lone Anglican in Assisi? Some verses from Psalm 87 come to mind. The psalmist is singing about Jerusalem and its centrality for Jews from all backgrounds:

*His foundation is on the holy mountains.
The Lord loves the gates of Zion
more than all the dwellings of Jacob.
Glorious things are spoken of you, Zion, city of our God.*

As so many of our friars and sisters of various origins are finding their way here it strikes me with more force all the time how Assisi is home to us all.

*I record Egypt and Babylon as those who know me;
behold Philistia, Tyre and Ethiopia:
in Zion were they born.*

In a similar sense we can say this about Assisi. The city of Assisi is our city. This is where it all began, and we can visit the places that were important to Francis. We all have our home in Assisi and in that sense we were all born here.

*And of Zion it shall be said,
'Each one was born in her,
and the Most High himself has established her.'
The Lord will record as he writes up the peoples,
'This one also was born there.'
And as they dance they shall sing,
"All my fresh springs are in you."*

It could sound presumptuous but in that sense all of our brothers and sisters are away from home when they are not in Assisi. Technically I am a friar at Glasshampton, and the brothers there pray for me every evening as 'away from the house tonight', and I need that prayer. And I need to pray for all the others, away from home today. May we find our 'fresh springs' here in the city of Francis and Clare.

In Assisi, May-June and September-October are the busiest seasons, July-August is the time summer residents can be counted on. The place gets pretty quiet by mid-November. Things pick up a little around Christmas, and the Carol service, complete with mince pies and mulled wine, is a highlight. The real still time is from mid-January till mid-March. It's a good time to build on fraternal relations with the 'other' Franciscans.

As Anglicans we have the use of a little medieval church, the oratory of a Confraternity, originally under the patronage of St Leonard, but now known as the Confraternità di San Francesco. We have a small but loyal congregation, who see welcoming visitors as part of their mission. Most travel some distance to Assisi.



On many a Sunday visitors easily outnumber the regulars. We are always happy when visiting groups include worship with us in their itinerary. These groups are not always British - it is not unusual to find groups of Danes or Swedes. If I know beforehand I do my best to have copies of the day's Readings in their language.

Marriage blessings are an additional and special ministry. Couples find a romantic location for their wedding on the web and the venue arranges the civil ceremony (a requirement in Italy), flowers, reception, dinner, and the rest. If the 'rest' includes a 'religious' ceremony, that's where I come in. I get called in six or seven times each year. Building a pastoral relationship with these couples is not easy but we do the best we can by exploring the rationale of the marriage ceremony by email, choosing the readings so that meeting them finally at the event is a real joy. It would be tempting to expand this ministry (there's certainly a 'market' and the financial remuneration is considerable), but that could commercialise the ministry and undo the very purpose of bringing God into couples' lives.

Visiting Britain

Eric Michael arrived in September to spend a year in this province. Here he shares his first impressions:

When asked by Br. Jude, in America, where I wanted to go for my year overseas, I told him the European Province because I do urban ministry and there is much going on in London and Leeds that I am interested in observing. So the obvious place for me to start was Hilfield Friary. (For those of you that know this house; you may well be puzzled or laughing because it is very rural, complete with animals and garden). I took it as an opportunity to further my growth in humility. To be honest, I actually enjoyed myself at Hilfield. I was a bit sceptical at first. Why were all these people living alongside the brothers? Why do we need this garden when we have a Tesco? Go shovel chicken what? Since I grew up in Chicago, this was a completely new experience for me. I loved the quiet and beauty of the location. I soon found that I really enjoyed the mixed community of people - men, women, young, old, brothers, volunteers - even a newborn baby, Uriel. Prayer was taken seriously, but with an openness to new experiences. Christmas was especially lovely. I also got to take my hand at cooking meals. I was a bit nervous, since in America I was known for cooking spicy and often, exotic meals; and my knowledge of the British palate was scant, prejudiciously skewed toward the bland and mushy. I gave it a go, anyway, and usually scored a victory -usually. After a few months, I was part of the team. Groups would visit and we would laugh it up,

or discuss topics of concern to the church and world today. I had many a moving experience. (I also continued in my finding the joy in a situation and going with it. I don't generally dwell on the morose). All in all, my time at Hilfield was well-spent and pleasant. I now have moved on to London and am awaiting my time as a volunteer for various charities in the neighbourhood and within London at large. I hope to visit other areas of the Province during my stay, and expect to be amazed at the small gifts of God bestowed upon the brothers and their varied works. Keep an eye out for me; you never know where I may show up!

CDC Zimbabwe

John writes:

In October I spent a fortnight sharing the life of the brothers, staff and residents at the Community of the Divine Compassion in the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe, which was founded as an African Franciscan brotherhood in the 1980s. The purpose of my visit was to encourage the development of closer links between CDC and SSF.



Zimbabwe had recently experienced some of its toughest times since independence, marked by severe food shortages and a particularly violent period of political intimidation which gave rise to continuing divisions within the Anglican church. Though strained almost to breaking point, the brothers somehow survived, and were instrumental in helping their neighbours to pull through. Now they are devoting themselves to the renewal of their life, both through prayer in a chapel made from their former water cistern, and the pastoral care of some of the most vulnerable people in Nyanga. Income generated from the friary guest house is allocated to the college education of half a dozen orphaned young men who live with the brothers.

Life in Zimbabwe remains precarious and unpredictable. Many are hungry or sick. Yet I could not help but be inspired by the warmth of the welcome I received, and the generous and tenacious spirit of the people. To be with them is a wonderful blessing, and to realize how much they can teach us about living together in the faith of Christ, and praying with exuberant hope, "Oh that we might see better times." November saw the consecration of CDC's new diocesan bishop, Julius Makoni, before a congregation of 8,000 in Mutare. He covets our prayers as he embarks on an episcopate that fills him with exhilaration and trepidation.

Round up

Damian has moved from Holy Island to Hilfield, Gerardo from Glasshampton to Alnmouth and Peter from Alnmouth to Hilfield. Maximilian began two terms of study at Westcott House, Cambridge on 5 January. Over the summer and autumn, Hilary, Jannafer and Phyllis will move to Birmingham; Jenny Tee to Leicester, Judith Ann, Liz and Maureen to Metheringham; and Sue to Southwark. Jennifer Chan has returned to Sarawak for a two-year period. After a brief holiday in the UK, Bart has returned to Australia to do a course at the Brisbane Conservatorium. *f*